

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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INVOLVING COMMUNITY AND PARENTS.

BY- SHAPIRO, ELLIOT AND OTHERS

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THE FIRST PAPER OF A PANEL, BY AARON BROWN, BRIEFLY REVIEWS SOME ISSUES OF PARENT-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS. HE NOTES THE INCREASING COMMUNITY CONCERN WITH BETTER TEACHER PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE, QUALITY INTEGRATED EDUCATION, AND VARIOUS CURRENT EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES. HE POINTS OUT THAT THE PRINCIPAL IS THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF PARENT-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. HARRY GOTTESFELD STATES THAT GHETTO RESIDENTS HAVE THE GREATEST UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHILD'S LIFE AND SCHOOL BEHAVIOR AND, THEREFORE, COMMUNITY PEOPLE CAN OFFER CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE TO TEACHER EDUCATION. HE OUTLINES SIX PRODUCTIVE ROLES FOR COMMUNITY RESIDENTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION AND IN THE SCHOOLS. DON WATKINS SAYS THAT LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES CAN EXPLAIN THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF POVERTY AREAS TO TEACHER TRAINEES, INVOLVE THEM IN AREA ACTIVITIES, AND OFFER THEM DIRECT PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE POOR. HE URGES THAT SCHOOL SYSTEMS GUARANTEE PARENT-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING BEFORE TEACHERS ARE PLACED IN THE SCHOOLS AND THAT ADULT EDUCATION COURSES TRAIN RESIDENTS FOR VARIOUS PROFESSIONAL JOBS. ELLIOTT SHAPIRO IN SUMMARIZING THE PANEL PAPERS ADDS HIS CRITICISM OF THE "ALOOFNESS AND SMUGNESS" OF THE EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT, AND SUGGESTS THAT TEACHER TRAINEES BE TAUGHT HOW TO COPE WITH THIS ESTABLISHMENT. (NH)

CHAPTER TWELVE

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INVOLVING COMMUNITY AND
PARENTS

Discussants:

M. M. SYLVESTER KING

FR. DOROTHY MCGEOCH

Dr. Elliot Shapiro

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SUMMARY The disparities that exist in education for Negroes in the South when compared with facilities that are available for the whites were described. It was indicated that community and parent involvement are a relatively recent concern of school people. A lay board of education is representative of the community and the importance of this type of board was stressed. The school principal is the key to the tone of the school and it takes courage for the principal and the teacher to try innovation.

The fact that teachers are armored with stereotypes was a matter for concern. These stereotypes lend themselves to lack of effort by the teachers and are a factor in instilling discouragement. A great lack exists in the area of understanding the poor child and the influences that play upon him. The people of the ghetto may have an educating influence but that is rarely recognized, and even more rarely utilized. Community involvement of parents in paid positions as consultants, community coordinators, attendance officers, local board members and workshop participants was proposed.

One of the panelists was critical of the quality of the instruction of teachers and he added that mothers share this criticism. Little awareness exists of the wide variety of living that occurs in the slums. Much education takes place in the streets and this is hardly utilized in the classroom. He also urged the necessity for involvement of community residents in the educational process and stressed that teachers must develop greater experience with the urban poor. Programs should be pre-designed, and the poor should participate in the planning and the decision making. The need for developing experience in dialogue was particularly stressed. It was also noted that attitudinal changes follow behavior changes.

It was recommended that faculties should allow parents to make their agendas for faculty meetings. Faculty members should enter the community as listeners rather than as experts. Faculties should also realize that they must work with all groups. Action orientation as opposed to experimentation and research was suggested since the poor are tired of being researched and investigated. Since resources are meager the need to concentrate services rather than to scatter them was stressed.

Certain outcomes were expected. Teachers would become aware of the strengths that exist in the slums. Members of the community would develop new careers and aspirations. Schools would have more effective teachers; and colleges would have learned how to work together in developing higher achievement levels.

One discussant said that students must make up their own minds in regard to values and methods. In this kind of participation they will have learned to do so.

It should be questioned whether the establishment does wish to involve the community. Community involvement is so alien that we have had little or no opportunity to develop skills in working with the community. As members of the establishment we are afraid, hidebound and smug. We are also aloof, arrogant, and

totally unaware. We possess a double standard for appraisal of parents' interests. The discussant wondered who was better prepared for initiating contacts, the community or the educational establishment? He urged us to be excitingly unorthodox. He stressed the recognition of the need for dissidents and urged us to be aware of a context from which we develop interpretations.



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REACTION According to their several styles, the panelists and the discussants were generally agreed on the need for training the teachers to become more understanding of the community in which they teach. It was also generally agreed that this understanding should be joined to a much higher level of commitment to the children in their classrooms and to the residents of these communities. This reactor agrees particularly with the discussant who stressed that community involvement has exposed the aloofness and smugness of the educational establishment. It was not, however, sufficiently stressed that the educational establishment encompasses not only the public schools in the ghetto areas and the city-wide systems of which they are a part, but also the teacher education institutions that provide the school systems with their teachers. It is difficult to say whether the school systems so greatly influence the colleges that the consequence follows that their young teachers are graduated with disappointingly low level of commitment, or whether the colleges themselves are as estranged as the school systems which they supply.

In view of the general recognition that educational establishments are so restrictive, it is rather surprising that no discussant and no panelist discussed the necessity that any committed teacher would have for developing methods for coping with establishment. This would seem to be so important that colleges could well consider developing seminars and workshops for this purpose. Or would these seminars and workshops pose a threat to the establishment qualities that are inherent in the colleges?

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Dr. Aaron Brown

In my remarks I shall deal in broad guidelines in the hope that more details can be brought out during the period for questions.

The Dictionary of Education is the basis of my concept of preservice and inservice teacher education. The definitions go further than implying that there may be community and parent involvement.

I do not generalize about the "disadvantaged" because my long experience as a student of the problem has convinced me that the condition is no respecter of groups whether education, ethnic, racial, economic, or status. I am aware that the highest percentage of educational disadvantage is among minority people, especially Negroes and Puerto Ricans in this section of the nation.

I am deeply concerned with the "Large City" concept of community. This is best explained by Landis' *Man In Environment: An Introduction to Sociology*. The community is a geographical area but it also has social dimensions.

If an institution of higher learning, with a teacher education program, is located in a community, then parent and community involvement is a challenge and an opportunity. This does not preclude colleges and universities not located in the neighborhood from meaningful cooperation with communities and parents outside the normal area of operation.

Community and parent involvement is a relatively recent development. In its 1955 publication—*Staff Relations in School Administration*, the American Association of School Administrators said: "Schools must be concerned with providing opportunity for effective learning along lines believed desirable by the supporting communities." Parent involvement is essential to secure the aspirations and expectations of the community.

Gordon and Wilkerson in their 1966 book—*Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged*—describe in Chapter V—dealing with "Community Involvement" a number of programs and practices which set the trend toward involvement by communities and parents in influencing teacher education programs. "The interrelationship between the school, the children, and the parents develop against the background of a single entity of which they are all a part—the community."

James B. Conant in his book, *The Education of American Teachers*, 1963, pleads for more community involvement. He seems to be convinced that this involvement can be most effective if channeled through a representative lay board of education. The author makes clear that "among the most complex and controversial issues in public education today is the question of how teachers themselves ought to be educated. Long a subject of heated debate between members of academic faculties and their colleagues in schools of education, it has increasingly involved the lay public as well."

One should not overlook the involvement and resulting influence on teacher education of such organizations as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. A survey of their significant involvement includes among many: safety education; social hygiene; school lunches; public kindergartens; playgrounds; dental clinics; and international relations. The impli-

cations of these to preservice and inservice teacher education are obvious.

Percy F. Burrup in his book *The Teacher and the Public School System*, 1967, discussing community involvement states: "The number of these community organizations has increased in the last few years. They represent one of the outstanding recent developments in education. Some have been organized upon invitation of local boards of education; others have been organized in protest to the local public school program. They function under many different names and under many different kinds of sponsorship."

This surge of greater concern on the part of communities and parents for improved preparation of teachers, more effective performance, quality-integrated education and understandable evaluative criteria grows out of their recognition of the potential of disadvantaged children and the lack of adequate motivation by the public schools. Parents of disadvantaged children are questioning "testing procedures", the track system, the general diploma, guidance and counseling of the underprivileged, instructional material, placement, limitations of vocational education, etc. Most of these parents are academically impoverished but they hold high aspirations for their children. Such parents have more wisdom than most teachers realize.

Several recent forces have encouraged these parents in their efforts. Among them: 1- The Federal Government; the Office of Economic Opportunity, The Civil Rights Acts. 2- Human and civil rights organizations. 3- Political pressures at the local level. 4- The influence of research, experimentation, demonstrations, etc. 5- The wider visions and understanding on the part of school boards of education, administrators and teachers. 6- The genuine search for better ways of preparing teachers for the disadvantaged on the part of a growing number of colleges and universities. 7- Private foundations' support of innovations. 8- Concern about the problems of the disadvantaged by state departments of education. Also, the New York State Legislature and the 1967 Constitutional Convention are considering many matters which are related to our topic.

The key person in the success or failure of community and parent involvement is the school principal. I have long been convinced that Cubberley was right when he said "As is the principal so is the school."

In 1964 Prentice Hall published its *School Executive's Guide*. Chapter 40 deals with "Keys to Effective School Community Relations" and offers many excellent suggestions for the acceptance and utilization of community and parent involvement in teacher education, especially inservice education.

These are suggested guidelines: Teachers must

- know the reasons for the behavior of disadvantaged children and their outlook on life.
- understand the attitudes and feelings of educationally disadvantaged children through empathy.
- appreciate the role of home and community in finding solutions to problems.
- understand special problems faced by large city schools.
- not be "attitudinally disadvantaged" teachers who are unaware of their own prejudice.
- have courage to try innovations.
- be exposed to experiences with disadvantaged children early in the preservice preparation of teachers in schools, in homes and in communities.
- make use of the vast amount of material now available in this field.

If we are unwilling or unable to meet the needs of the educationally disadvantaged children in our large city public schools by 1970 fifty percent (50%) of the students will be so classified. Our colleges and universities and our school systems must cooperate more effectively to prevent this sad state of affairs.

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Dr. Harry Gottesfeld

Teacher education characteristically emphasizes learning theories, educational techniques, materials and curriculum. In teacher education regarding the ghetto child, stress is also placed on the limitations of the child's home and community and using stereotyped notions such as "culturally deprived child", "socially disadvantaged child". Armed with this knowledge, our teachers who venture forth into the ghetto school quickly find that what they have learned is of little use. They often become discouraged because they feel that they are unable to teach the ghetto child. Many of them are likely to either transfer out or give up teaching altogether.

What is most lacking in teacher education for ghetto areas is an understanding of what the child is like, what influences shape his life, what his values are and what meaning education has for him. It is in this area that people of the ghetto can have an important role in teacher education. Community people intimately know poverty and discrimination and the survival techniques of living in the ghetto. They, perhaps more than anyone else, understand the child's reactions to the neighborhood school and the meaning he may attach to various aspects of the educational program. They themselves have gone through similar experiences. While their life experiences do not give community people a monopoly of knowledge as to what is best in ghetto education, it does give them an important contribution to make. This potentially significant contribution is rarely utilized.

In one school in Harlem where teachers had great difficulty in maintaining discipline, a number of children of this school belonged to an after school organization run by a local mother. When the organization had begun, discipline was a problem, but shortly discipline problems disappeared. The methods that the parent leader of this organization used were never conveyed to the teachers of the school, although the parent leader wished to share her ideas.

A common role for community people in the school system is teacher-aide. In roles like this it is unlikely that the community will have much influence in educating teachers. The roles that parents and community leaders should be playing in the school setting require greater dignity and power. I can think of at least five roles for community leaders in which they would shape both the formal and informal aspects of teacher training.

Consultants to students being trained as teachers and educators. Project Leon of Yeshiva University trains teachers and other professionals for ghetto schools. As part of this training, experts from diverse fields associated with education relate their experiences and views about education. The one group to whom the students showed the greatest enthusiasm and felt had contributed most to their training were community leaders and parents from different ghetto areas of New York City, actively involved in seeking quality education.

Members of strong local school boards. Although community leaders have been part of school boards in New York City, these

boards currently are only advisory and have little influence on educational procedures. Civil rights groups and community people have been battling for autonomous local school boards in which important powers would be invested. If this occurs and it is quite likely, the influence of parents and community leaders on the educational system would be great. It would have ramifications for in-service teacher training as well as all other aspects of educational practice. The inadequacies in teacher education for the ghetto schools would probably be an early target for attack by strong local community boards.

Community Coordinator. Ghetto areas characteristically show poor relations between school personnel and community people. One group knows little of the other and prejudices stand uncorrected. A local person, first trained in educational practice and community organization, would be the ideal person to bridge the gap between school and community. The person filling this position could provide in-service training to administrators and teachers regarding the community and community views. He would also serve to explain the program and services of the school to the community.

Attendance Officer. Local people as compared to non-community people are more likely to know why children stay away from school, where they go and the best ways of influencing their return to school. A local person serving as attendance officer could contribute greatly to in-service training by informing teachers about the attitudes of children toward school and possible ways of influencing these attitudes.

Participants in workshops for administrators, teachers and parents in solving problems in the ghetto school. Each of these groups has a contribution to make and through problem solving together each participant will learn the other points of view. Teachers and administrators who have been taught characteristic methods of dealing with school problems will benefit from other approaches.

Just as it is important to invest teachers with authority and status in order for them to be able to carry out their role as teachers, it is also important that the teachers of teachers have authority and status. If community leaders are to assume a role in the education of teachers, they must be given the dignity, responsibility and status of the kinds of roles in the educational system such as have been outlined. When community leaders assume such roles it will not only have important implications for teacher education but may also serve to raise the educational level of ghetto children. James Coleman et. al. in *Equality of Educational Opportunity* indicates that feelings of "powerlessness" are important variables in children's achievement. Ghetto children seeing their parents and other community people in positions of status and authority in the school system may feel less powerless.



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Dr. Don O. Watkins

During a recent community meeting a mother said to some Brooklyn College instructors, "You trained the teachers that are in our schools. And they are not teaching our children. Why do you think you can help us now—and how?" Unless we redesign our teacher education programs in ways that engage us more closely with parents and communities, we are not likely to provide adequate answers to this two-pronged question.

Recommendations

There are three areas in which we need to work with parents and community organizations.

Teacher Training

Within low-income communities there exists the feeling that teachers generally "do not want to teach our children". Research does reveal that both pre-service and experienced teachers tend to have distorted images of families and communities of the poor. There is preoccupation with what are regarded as parental and family inadequacies, and negative features of community life. There seems to be little awareness of the wide variety of life styles that exist within communities characterized as disadvantaged.

Addressing himself to this concern, one local leader said, "The education of the workers needs to start here in the streets, in the community of Harlem, not over there in the college building".

The community can provide teachers-in-training with three important ingredients of education. First, participants in many community action programs and neighborhood associations are qualified to teach our students the results of the many excellent surveys they have made of these areas. That is, our students need much more knowledge about the demographic characteristics of the population living in poverty areas. Community residents can teach what our students need to know. They should be employed to do so.

Second, our students need to learn through first-hand experiences much more about the physical environment and activity of poverty areas. They need to go with community residents to the housing, parks, gathering places, stores, play areas, industry, political clubs, voluntary association meetings, houses of worship, tenant meetings—in short, to all of the places that are important in the life of the people. In low-income communities there are scores of people who want to participate in this type of orientation of teachers.

Third, and most crucial, the vast majority of teachers and students preparing to teach, have not had, and sorely need, sustained personal experiences with the contemporary urban poor. We need to develop many opportunities for our students to have such experiences. In this way they will come to know and regard the poor as individuals rather than as group stereotypes.

Education of Children and Youth

No longer may colleges and schools go to communities with pre-designed programs to impose on the parents and their children. Teacher education faculties need to heed the voices of those who are seeking to participate in making decisions about education.

Recently a parent said, "There have always been opportunities to meet with the community, if there had been any desire". It is

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time to demonstrate our desire. We should inform school systems that we will work only with those schools that do agree to include parents and community groups in the decision-making processes affecting the education of their children.

Faculties, when invited, should join with neighborhood residents and local school personnel to form planning boards that will focus on ways to improve the education of disadvantaged children. These boards should be empowered to select school personnel and develop proposals for and implement innovations in organization, curriculum and teacher training in a complex of schools in the respective communities.

Education of Adult Residents

Teacher education programs would become more vital if they included the education of adults in disadvantaged communities. We need to participate much more systematically in the training of community residents for a variety of professional jobs, such as auxiliary teachers. Also, at locations in the poverty communities, we need to offer education designed to meet the interests of adult residents.

The courses should be worked out in cooperation with community residents, and especially with Community Action Programs. To become more effective we need to engage in genuine dialogue with the community. As of now, colleges are frequently regarded as alien, aloof and arrogant.

Bases for the Recommendations

In addition to the reasons already stated for them, the recommendations are based on three other assumptions.

People are most effective when they work together on an equal status basis to identify and solve their common problems.

Competition among contending forces is reduced and cooperation develops when they come together on a planning and decision-making body for the purpose of securing a common goal.

Attitude changes tend to follow behavioral changes. Thus, proposals are all action oriented with an emphasis on developing dialogue among groups that now have distorted images of each other.

Guidelines for Implementation

Teacher education programs should establish a high priority for involvement of parents and communities by making adequate budget and staff commitment to it. Otherwise it becomes peripheral and mere lip-service.

Faculties need to enter the communities as listeners, not as experts with pre-determined programs.

Faculties must work with all groups, associations and unaffiliated leaders in the communities, not just those regarded as "responsible".

Faculties and programs need primarily to be action oriented and only secondarily experimental. Research and evaluation should be ongoing and used to alter or expand action. Parents in poverty are tired of "studies of" and "experiments on" their children, and view with suspicion projects that seem designed as one more experiment.

Colleges do not have unlimited human, financial and physical resources. Thus, to be effective, we need to concentrate rather than scatter them.

Expected Outcomes

Much of what we would hope to achieve by implementing the recommendations has already been suggested, at least implicitly, in the foregoing. Perhaps the most significant outcome would be that parents, communities, schools and colleges would be working together to enable disadvantaged children to experience a quality education of high achievement, which tragically they now do not.